

## Camel Spiders

*For Service members and their Families*

### Important Facts

- "Camel spider" is a common name for one type of solifugae (often called "false spiders") that is a large spider-looking creature found in desert regions of the Middle East and Southwest Asia.
- Camel spiders do not have venom glands and pose no threat to humans, except for the painful pinch they can inflict with their powerful jaws.
- Camel spiders are very aggressive and may bite if cornered or handled.
- Camel spiders eat other venomous insects, spiders, scorpions and centipedes.

### What are camel spiders?

Camel spiders, despite their name and appearance, are not spiders, scorpions, or insects. They do not have venom or silk glands to make webs. They look like a cross between a spider, a scorpion, and an insect and are closely related to all three.

### What do camel spiders look like?

Camel spiders are usually light grey or tan in color. Their body lengths range from ½ to 4 inches (1-10 cm), not counting outstretched legs.

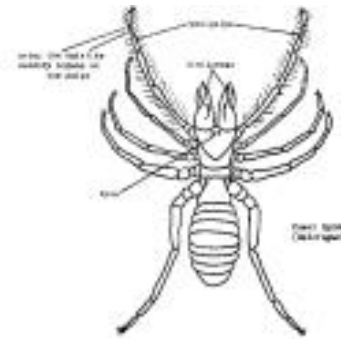


They are spider-like in shape with a rounded, segmented abdomen (hind portion of body). The legs and body are covered with long hairs that glisten in the sunlight. They may appear to have ten legs, but upon closer inspection, the front legs are not legs at all. These front appendages or pedipalps are sticky on the end to help catch and hold prey, and this also give the camel spiders the ability to climb smooth surfaces such as glass. Like true spiders, camel spiders have eight legs, but they only use the back six for walking and running. The front pair of legs, held out

in front and over their heads, used like antennae to feel where they are going. The most noticeable feature of camel spiders is their large paired jaws. Each chelicera works like a combination pliers/knife tool, used to grab and crush prey, then worked with a sawing motion to chew prey into pulp.

### Where do camel spiders live?

Most camel spiders are found in the hot desert regions of the world, including the desert regions of the Middle East and Southwest Asia. To escape the daytime heat, camel spiders retreat to areas under rocks, logs and other debris or burrow into the sand or soil. They are usually active only at night.



### Are camel spiders dangerous to people?

Camel spiders may seem fierce and intimidating, but they pose no serious threat to people. Camel spiders do not have any venom glands, and they rely on their strong jaws and speed to avoid enemies and catch prey. Camel spiders however, are very aggressive, and they can inflict a painful bite with their powerful jaws if cornered or handled. The larger species can easily puncture and tear skin and infections may occur at the bite site as with any spider bite. In a way, camel spiders are helpful to humans, since their diet includes many types of venomous insects, spiders, scorpions and centipedes.

**How can I avoid being bitten by a camel spider if I am in an area where they are present? (These measures will also help prevent bites from other spiders and scorpions)**

- Look before you reach into, under, over or around!
- Don't try to pick one up.

**Your Suggestions:** [http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil/product\\_feedback.jsp](http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil/product_feedback.jsp)

**Visit the Deployment Health and Family Readiness Library:** <http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil>

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- Eliminate as many of the hiding places as possible for camel spiders and their prey.
- Sandbag around the edges of tents to seal entry gaps.
- Always shake out shoes, sleeping bags, and clothing before you use them.
- Never walk barefoot; wear shoes or boots (*avoid open-toed footwear*) when walking outdoors.
- If possible, avoid sleeping on the ground. Make sure that bedding does not touch tent or room walls.
- In buildings, install sealant and weather stripping around thresholds and gaps where utilities enter structures.
- Use sticky board traps placed along tent and building edges, and under furniture to capture camel spiders.
- Take proper precautions: Wear gloves when handling tentage, rocks, crates, and lumber or when moving materials that have been in contact with the ground.
- Camel spiders on your body should be brushed off, not swatted.

- **Fiction:** Camel spiders inject venom that contains a powerful anesthetic that numbs bite victims and also rots the flesh and muscle.  
**Fact:** Camel spiders have no venom glands; their jaws can break the skin and infections may occur at the bite site.
- **Fiction:** Camel spiders will stalk humans, making screaming noises as they approach.  
**Fact:** Camel spiders cannot scream, and the loudest noise they make is from the sound of their jaws crunching prey. At night, camel spiders will run towards any light source, including flashlights and campfires. During the day, they will try to stay in shadows to avoid hot patches of ground. Camel spiders will follow a moving human shadow, making it seem like they are chasing you.

### What are some of the common myths and folklore associated with camel spiders?

- **Fiction:** Camel spiders grow as large as dinner plates.  
**Fact:** A hoax on the internet uses picture tricks to portray camel spiders as almost a foot tall. The largest are no more than 6 inches (15 cm) long with legs outstretched; most average ½ to 3 inches (1-7 cm).
- **Fiction:** Camel spiders lay their eggs in and eat the bellies of camels.  
**Fact:** A camel spider's real diet includes insects, scorpions, spiders, centipedes, and sometimes small lizards. Most lay their eggs in underground burrows or in woody crevices.
- **Fiction:** Camel spiders can jump up to 6 feet in the air and run as fast as 25 mph.  
**Fact:** Their running speed is actually about a mile an hour; jumping ability is poor but some are excellent climbers and can crawl up trees and the walls of buildings in search of prey.



### References:

- Punzo, F.** 1988. The Biology of Camel-Spiders (*Arachnida, Solifugae*). Kluwer Academic Publishers, Norwell, MA 02061 USA.
- Harwood, R., and James, M.** 1979. Entomology in Human and Animal Health, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, NY 10022, pp 457-458.

### Where Do I Get More Information?

Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)  
Phone: (888) 232-3764  
<http://www.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>

DoD Force Health Protection & Readiness (FHP & R)  
Phone: (800) 497-6261  
<http://fhp.osd.mil>

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)  
Phone: (800) 222-9698/ (410) 436-3613  
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/ento>

DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)  
Phone: (866) 559-1627  
<http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)  
Phone: (757) 953-0700  
<http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>



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